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Viewed from driveway, home perches like flying saucer.

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THIS IS the house that Jack built. This is the odd-shaped lot off Branciforte Drive that proved perfect for the round house that Jack built.

This is the story of the 14-year dream that resulted in the unusual house that Jack built.

Jack is general contractor Jack Richter, who has spent most of his life building 500-to-600-home developments in Santa Clara Valley and the East Bay for Blackwell Homes. For a time, he also constructed commercial buildings and custom homes in San Bernardino. In his lifetime, Richter estimates he has overseen the building of over 6,000 homes, townhouses, commercial buildings, hospitals, fire stations, schools...

But spinning around in his mind were thoughts of a house he really wanted to build — a circular home like one that he had seen 14 years ago.

His "someday" came two years ago when Richter moved to Santa Cruz County and bought two lots six-and-a-half miles from downtown Santa Cruz on a redwood-forested hillside.

At first, he built a conventional home. Then he turned his sights to the other lot, an already-bulldozed pad part way down a hillside. The pad would need a lot more bulldozing to accommodate a conventional home.

"It clicked after I tried to design a conventional home for the lot. Why not try something different? This area warranted this kind of (round) structure," Richter said.

What resulted was a two-story, 3,000-square foot home that looks like something from outer space. "If I put twirling lights on it, it might look like a flying saucer," Richter said, with a chuckle.

The construction is easy to explain, added Richter. Just think of a wagon wheel. The roof and the floors are like giant wagon wheels, lying on their sides and connected by bowed, four-foot-wide plywood panels.

The house was structurally designed by John R. Frazer Structural Design in Santa Cruz.

The hub is the central, 5-foot-square skylight, from which radiate the roof beams or the spokes of the wheel. These beams connect with the wall beams. The exposed wood ceiling on the main floor really gives the illusion of living under a wagon wheel.

"The roof is the highlight of the building," Richter beamed. "You could build this with a conventional, 8-foot-high ceiling that has been sheetrocked, but you wouldn't get the same effect."

The rooms are pie-shaped, wide and slightly rounded at one end, narrowing as they come closer to the hub. Richter notes that people think they have to buy special furniture for the house, but that isn't so.

"People have square bedrooms and put in round beds and that's all right," he notes. "Since each room here is pie shaped, each has straight walls where you can use conventional furniture."

Richter has lived in the home since it was completed in October and his conventional furniture fits fine. A round, bean-bag chair that you'd think would be right at home here is discarded to the side.

The main floor — living-dining area, country kitchen, master bedroom and bath, two bedrooms, and bathroom — is the top floor of the home. The bedrooms are large enough at the wide ends for king-sized beds.

A spiral (what else, in a round house?) staircase leads to the ground floor, encircled by bedroom, bathroom and oversized two-car garage with workshop.

The home seems smaller than its 3,000 square feet, perhaps because of the amount of room taken by the central core. But Richter points out that the house is more spacious than a conventional, 3,000-square-foot home because the design alleviates the need for hallways, except around the core.

Richter noted that the home could be built in various diameters. If the two-story house were



Photos by Dan Coyro

Skylight acts as overhead hub of Jack Richter's 3,000-square-foot round house.

doubled in size to 61 feet in diameter, for example, each floor would contain 3,000 square feet, for a total of 6,000 square feet. Or a 61-foot-diameter, one-story model would total 3,000 square feet.

Does he plan to build another? Or perhaps an entire subdivision in the round?

"I guess I would do it again. I guess I am partial to this type of structure. I like something different."

He added that it is the type of home "for someone who wants something different from the ordinary." It definitely isn't a home for squares.